

INTERVIEW WITH JOTAJOTA

Why publish?

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It is the last week of April and, in Rosario, leaves in infinite shades of ocher rush over the sidewalks and clump together. The weather has turned cold after a torrid summer. Juan José Luetich awaits us, as agreed, to talk about his work. He receives us in an office with North American oak furniture: roll up desk, swivel chair, file cabinet and library. Access is difficult due to the presence of several computers and countless books, magazines, binders and papers.

—When did you start to write?

—I write since I can remember. In the grade school, the work I liked the most were the written assignments.

—Did you have a favorite subject?

—I preferred to pick the subject myself, but that was seldom possible.

—Were you interested in mathematics then?

—I never disliked them, but my strength was language. However, when I had to take the high school entrance exam, I got a higher grade in Mathematics than I did in Language by using an unorthodox method to solve a problem. That fact made me look at mathematics as a creative outlet that was as important as literature.

—What method do you use for writing?

—I spend a lot of time thinking. I usually do that while I walk. I try to go everywhere on foot. And I only write when my head is about to explode, when nothing else can fit into it. This could happen at any time, you never know. That is why sometimes, not having adequate writing materials on hand, I resort to bar napkins, wrapping paper, mail envelopes or supermarket receipts, to take down some notes. A great part of my doctoral thesis was written that way.

—That is not the advice we get from methodologists.

—Methodologists are people who say how something must be done that they never did. [laughter]

—Do you remember any topic that you spend a long time thinking about?

—Yes, of course. I dedicated a lot of time, among others, to the basis of the mathematical induction method. I must have spend years on that. One

day, when I thought I had finally gotten it out of my head, I thought about it again, and I realized something very important. Then I wrote an article. [I would like to add that once I pour out my ideas on paper, a lot of time goes by before I find the appropriate tone and write the final draft.]

—And did you publish it?

—Not at that time. It is among the things that will be published in this supplement.

—Were you not interested in publishing?

—I was never interested in publishing. I have only done it from time to time.

—Alfonso Reyes used to say that writers publish so as not to spend years rewriting the drafts. [smiles]

—Yes, he expressed it with much grace. I, on the other hand, published little to have fewer regrets.

—And what has led you to publish now?

—The year 2010 was a turning point in my life. I suffered an aortic dissection and came to be very close to death. The love of a woman, the doctors, the will to live, and the strength I got from my friends, saved my life. When I recovered and went back to work, I realized that, had I not returned, everything would have been lost: my work, a set of papers that only I could understand; my office, which is like the fulfillment of a dream—I worked for many years in a rented office—; my office furniture, which had cost me so much to collect and restore; my books, which are so valuable to me but who knows if they mean the same to someone else... This led me to rethink what I had been doing.

—As it is used to say, is the moment in life when you realize that you are not immortal.

—In my case it was more like realizing how close death was. I don't know how much time I have left. In truth, no one knows. What is new for me is that I am now a part of the group that is aware of that and I want to put my affairs in order.

—Did you have any vision or experience during that difficult moment?

—Yes, I did, but I am still searching for a language to faithfully communicate

it.

—Going back to the writing techniques, I see that you have several computers in your office...

—Yes, but I prefer writing on paper. I believe it is the fastest way to preserve your ideas. When I write I use symbols, arrows, and I make schemes. Doing all that in a machine takes much time. The same thing happens when you want to take notes during a class or a conference. Only the digitizing screens and tablets can come close, regarding speed, to writing on paper. I use computers for other things: to format articles, books, magazines and web pages, and to make graphic materials for use in class.

—We shall return soon to talk about the topics covered in the first issue.

—It shall be my pleasure. Thank you for your interest in my work.

Juan José Luetich ("Jotajota" ["Jay-jay," in Castilian], for his students) walked us to the door and kindly said goodbye. Out on the street I realized it was already dark. The gentle autumn breeze continued to play with the leaves and making the streetlamp that cast a pale light over them swing. As I review my notes, I fear that I may not be able to transmit all of the sensations I experienced during the conversation. I choose to transcribe them literally, adding only a couple of comments.

Juan José Luetich, philosopher, critic, writer, alchemist, mythographer, musicologist, mathematician, chemist, scientist, engineer, researcher, educator, programmer, linguist, translator, born in Rosario on January 24, 1964. After working for many years as a private tutor, he founded the Luventicus Academy of Sciences in 2001 with the purpose of exploring how the new communications media (digital documents, electronic messages) may be used in teaching. Since then he has worked as an editor, author, teacher, consultant and programmer for that organization. The positions he formally holds are: Editor of Serial Publications and Director of the Computational Chemistry Lab. He also teaches in mid and high level institutions (advanced and university), where he has collaborated in the creation and modification of study programs. The work of Juan José Luetich is interesting—more than just for the diversity of subjects it covers and its extent—because of the relationships it establishes between topics of distant specialties and the originality of the author's approach while presenting or resolving classical problems. Such a vast volume of work, however, has only one objective: to explain everything with clarity so that everyone understands.

About this publication

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